

Memorandum on Additional Guidelines for Charter Schools May 4, 2000

Memorandum for the Secretary of Education

Subject: Additional Guidelines for Charter Schools

My Administration has taken landmark steps to help State and localities improve educational opportunities for students by providing much needed resources to reduce class size, improve teacher quality, and expand summer school and after-school programs. Last year, for the first time ever, the Federal Government provided funds to States and localities specifically to intervene and assist low-performing schools. This year, our School Improvement Fund will provide \$134 million to States and localities to help them turn around low-performing schools. In addition, through the 1994 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and Goals 2000, States have developed standards and accountability systems to identify schools that are low performing. Already, we are seeing results from this focus on standards-based reform and greater investment, including a rise in test scores among our most disadvantaged students. Nonetheless, much work remains to be done. In too many communities, predominately low-income communities, there is still a shortage of high-quality educational opportunities available to students.

One of the most heartening educational developments during my Administration is the extraordinary growth of public charter schools. In 1992, just before I took office, there was only one charter school in the country, City Academy in St. Paul, Minnesota. Since then, because of strong leadership at the local, State, and Federal level, the number of charter schools has exploded and it is now estimated that there are more than 1,700 charter schools nationwide. The Federal Government has invested almost \$400 million in charter schools since 1994, and advocates of charter schools credit this investment for the remarkable growth of charter schools. The Budget that I sent to the Congress this year will provide \$175 million for charter schools in FY 2001. By next year, the charter school program will have helped nearly 2,400 charter schools since its inception, supporting my Administration's goal of creating 3,000 public charter schools by 2002.

Charter schools are a vital engine of school reform because they promote accountability for results, competition, and choice within the public school system. Unlike vouchers, which do nothing to increase the number of high-quality educational options for students in a community, charter schools allow local community groups, teachers, or parents to open public schools that meet their needs. And, unlike vouchers, charter schools do not drain taxpayer dollars from the public school system and are accountable to the public for results. Because charter schools are truly community-based schools created by local communities to address their own particular needs, it is essential that all institutions in a community understand how they can play a role with regard to charter schools. Every entity that can play a positive role in school reform needs to be engaged in ensuring that children and parents have high-quality public schools and choices among those public schools.

Among the community institutions that can provide important support for the goals of charter schools are local faith-based and business institutions. Both have resources that can support the efforts of charter schools to create high-quality, innovative learning environments that serve all children and help them to meet high standards.

Faith-based and community-based organizations play an important role in feeding the hungry, caring for the sick, and educating our children in communities around this Nation. Already many faith- and community-based organizations partner with government at the Federal, State, and local level to help our Nation's families. Under my Administration, faith-based organizations have also become eligible to receive Federal funds in an array of social programs on the same basis as other community-based organizations, consistent with the constitutional line between church and state. For example, States can use their welfare reform funds to contract with faith-based organizations on the same basis as other nongovernment providers to provide services such as job preparation, mentoring, childcare, and other services to help families moving from welfare to work. The 1998 Human Services reauthorization similarly allows

faith-based organizations to provide services under the Community Services Block Grant to reduce poverty, revitalize low-income communities, and help low-income families become self-sufficient.

Vice President Gore and I support such efforts and believe we can do even more to increase the valuable partnership role religiously affiliated and community-based organizations can play in addressing some of the most important issues facing our families and communities. My Administration has proposed to increase the involvement of such organizations in education, housing, community-development, criminal and juvenile-justice programs, in breaking the cycle of teen pregnancy, promoting responsible fatherhood, and helping families move from welfare to work. To help support these worthy causes, my Budget will provide tax breaks to encourage all Americans to give to charity.

Schools and faith communities should be reaching out to each other, in ways consistent with the Constitution, to support their common goals for children and families. There are successful partnerships between public schools and faith communities across the Nation in after-school programs, school safety, discipline, and student literacy. These range from mentoring programs jointly run by schools and interfaith groups to statewide summits on the role of faith-based groups in college preparation. In 1995, we sent every school district in the country the guidebook *Religion in the Public Schools: A Statement of Principles*. Last December, building on those principles, I announced a comprehensive set of guidelines to be mailed to every public school in the Nation and to leading religious organizations encouraging greater cooperation, within constitutional limits, between public schools and community groups, including faith-based organizations. The guidelines emphasized both the protection of private religious expression in schools and the prohibitions against coerced student participation in religious expression. These guidelines were the culmination of my Administration's 4-year effort to forge consensus on the role of religion in the schools.

Likewise, business institutions have proven themselves to be valuable partners in helping schools and school districts better prepare students to develop the skills and knowledge they need to be part of the 21st century workforce. Over the last 2 decades, businesses have played a leadership role at the local, State, and national

levels in supporting the need for school reform and advancing the standards-based movement. Although school-business partnership can be little more than a donation, there are many examples across the country of businesses that are working actively with schools to help improve the quality of public education. In these partnerships, businesses are working to help bolster school curricula, train teachers, implement technology effectively, offer mentors and tutors to students, and provide lessons in management and leadership. If this Nation's public schools are to offer the kind of high-quality education that prepares students for the world of work and active citizenship, then businesses must play a key role in this process.

Businesses have much to offer the charter movement. Because charter schools are exempt from many regulations governing traditional public schools, they have more freedom to develop innovative educational programs and to partner with business institutions in creative ways. Currently, there are over 100 employer-linked charter schools in operation across the country. These schools vary from those offering very focused career preparation, to those that incorporate modest exposure to jobs, careers, and employers. What they share in common are innovative environments that offer work-based and career-focused educational experiences for students from a wide variety of backgrounds.

But I believe that businesses can do more to work with charter schools to develop stimulating educational environments that prepare our students for the challenges of the workforce in the 21st century. I especially believe that employer-linked charter schools offer a new range of possibilities for those students who are not finding success in our more traditional public schools.

Accordingly, because there is still a great deal of confusion about how different entities can be involved in the charter movement, I direct you to work together with the Department of Justice to develop guidelines to be released prior to the 2000–2001 school year to help faith-based and other community-based and business institutions understand the role they can play in the charter school movement. Public charter schools must be nonsectarian and nondiscriminatory in their admissions and practices. In addition, as with other public schools, a charter school

May 4 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 2000

should not offer opportunities for the commercial exploitation of its students and/or its mission. However, there are numerous ways that faith-based groups and employers can play a positive role in creating and supporting public charter schools, just as other community organizations do. These guidelines would augment the existing guidelines for public charter schools and the guidelines for religious expression in public schools that I released in December.

Increasing the quality of education in this country for disadvantaged students is a national priority but requires the active involvement of

every affected community. In economically distressed communities, faith-based organizations and business partners can play critically important roles in providing needed support services and job-focused experiences for students who too often lack either. Ensuring that faith-based and business institutions can play a vigorous role in expanding educational opportunities while respecting the separation of church and state and the limitations on commercial involvement in schools is an important step to providing high-quality educational experiences for all children.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Webisode Chat With Tracy Smith of Channel One in St. Paul

May 4, 2000

Ms. Smith. So now we're going to go live, to the live webcast. So everyone out there watching us on your computer, thank you so much for joining us. Welcome to everybody. Thank you, City Academy. And thank you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you, Tracy. Are we ready to start?

Ms. Smith. We are ready to start.

The President. Well, let me begin by thanking Channel One and the Channel One schools and all those who are taking part in this Presidential Webisode Chat.

This has a rich history, really. Fifty years ago and more, President Roosevelt used the radio to bring democracy into the homes of the American people, with his Fireside Chats. Thirty years later, President Kennedy regularly used televised press conferences to do the same thing. And I think it's quite appropriate to use this newest medium of communication to answer more questions from more students. And I think we ought to get right to it.

All of you know that I'm speaking to you from the City Academy in St. Paul, Minnesota. It was the Nation's first charter school. I believe in these schools, and I've tried to promote them and want to do more, and that's why I'm here.

The most important thing that we can do today is to reach out and answer questions from the students of America, so let's begin. How do you want to do it, Tracy?

Education and Technology

Ms. Smith. Well, our first question is actually from Amy, who is from City Academy—we do have it in the computer here; it's question number zero—which is: What more can education do to improve people's lives and move them out of poverty?

The President. Well, I think the obvious answer is just to look at the difference in the job prospects and the income prospects of people who have education and people who don't. Education in this economy, where we have the lowest unemployment rate in 30 years—if you have enough education, you have almost a 100 percent guarantee that you'll have a good job and you can move out of poverty.

But it is, by and large, necessary to do more than graduate from high school. Most people, to have good job prospects, need at least 2 years of college. And I have worked very hard in the last 7 years to open the doors of college to everyone. We've increased the Pell grants. We've made student loans less expensive. And we have given a tax credit worth \$1,500 a year to virtually all Americans for the first 2 years of college. So the most important thing for you to know is, you'll get out of poverty if you have an education, but you need more than high school.

Ms. Smith. All right, great. A tech question, of course, since we're talking to a bunch of techies out there. This is question number 200: Mr. President, my math teacher uses technology